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ABSTRACT

Developing a community of people interested in improving student reading achievement is an ongoing trend in education. Time and effort need to be put forth to become engaged in studying and promoting reading achievement. With high stakes state-mandated testing, it becomes even more important for teachers, school administrators, and the lay public to be involved in promoting the public school reading curriculum. Grade level teachers or reading teachers may develop a plan for the school year on assisting students--these teachers can decide when to meet and what the agenda will consist of for the meetings. Teachers can take turns as leaders for the group sessions, and they can have opportunities to present ideas or serve as chairpersons; they need to be actively involved in participating at each meeting. Parents can also belong to this community of learners, since they will want to assist their offspring to achieve more optimally in reading, and teachers may well be involved in working with the parental community of learners. A vital asset in improving the reading curriculum is the involved school administrator, who can have considerable influence in teaching and learning situations. Learning opportunities in reading need to provide for individual differences so that students individually may do as well as possible in learning to read well. (Contains 14 references.) (NKA)

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# Developing a Reading Community.

by Marlow Ediger

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## DEVELOPING A READING COMMUNITY

Developing a community of people interested in improving student reading achievement is an ongoing trend in education. This group needs to understand student needs and teaching of reading methodology. Learning here can be continuous and indepth. Time and effort need to be put forth to become engaged in studying and promoting reading achievement. Motivation and perseverance are two key concepts to stress when emphasizing a community of learners in reading instruction. With high stakes state mandated testing, it becomes even more important for teachers, school administrators, and the lay public to be involved in promoting the public school reading curriculum.

### Developing a Community of Learners in the School Setting

Grade level teachers may develop a plan for the ensuing school year on assisting students in reading achievement. These grade level teachers need to decide on when to meet and what the agenda will consist of for the meetings. Leadership may rotate for the different meeting dates. Thus, teachers individually have opportunities to be a leader for a group session. Each person should then have opportunities to

1. serve as chairperson for a community of learners session.
2. present ideas for the next agenda.
3. listen to the thinking of others within the community of learners.
4. be actively involved in participating at each meeting.
5. respect the thinking of the engaged person's ideas.
6. assist the chairperson to conduct a productive meeting.
7. learn methods of good group dynamics whereby ideas presented tend to circulate within the group, not between/among a few members only.
8. develop feelings of belonging in a community of learners.
9. provide opportunities for an individual to achieve status within a group setting.
10. learn as much as possible about the teaching of reading (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Thirteen).

There is much to learn in a community of learners when quality interaction among its members occur. Readiness is an important factor for each new meeting of the community. Each person then needs to possess adequate background information to benefit from the next meeting. Readiness comes about from doing much reading about the topic to be pursued,

thinking, studying, and observing the reading behavior of students in the classroom.

## A Community of Classroom Reading Teachers

Classroom reading teachers for a specific grade level have common, as well as unique, problems to discuss in assisting each student to achieve as optimally as possible. The identified problems need to be clearly selected so that research may be done to arrive at a solution. Reference materials must be available in the school's professional library for reading teachers. These materials may consist of textbooks, video-tapes, cassettes, basal readers of several series and accompanying workbooks, slides, filmstrips, films, computerized reading software, and professional journals.

Community members need to

1, identify problem areas and agree upon the importance of each for the community of learners. Individual endeavors are also to be highly respected and prized in selecting problem areas to pursue.

2. data sources used to obtain answers to a problem should be recent, possess quality ideas, be relevant, and understandable. Adequate information needs to be secured.

3. hypotheses developed need to be in answer to the problem chosen for solving. Each hypothesis must be clearly stated, free from vagueness and haziness. Clarity of statement is vital.

4. hypotheses need to be considered as being tentative and subject to change. Each hypothesis needs to be evaluated as to their accuracy and worth.

5. hypothesis may be assessed through additional research and thought. Reading and studying materials of instruction from the professional school library is a good way to test an hypothesis.

6. hypotheses may be changed when necessary to do so from data and information acquired.

7. try out the new idea in a normal classroom setting and obtain feedback from using the innovative concept in teaching.

8. evaluate the feedback results to modify the innovation and reteach if need be.

9. provide information to the community of learners on the reactions to the new idea in teaching.

10. encourage others to try the innovative idea in teaching their own students (See Ediger, 1993, 17-20).



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New ideas in teaching reading need to be used in teaching and learning situations to bolster student achievement in reading. The classroom setting is the place to enhance student learning in the reading curriculum. Becoming an enthused reader is a vital goal for student attainment.

## Parents as a Community of Learners

Parents have identified problems pertaining to assisting their offspring to achieve more optimally in reading. They can be a highly valuable partner to the teacher to secure better public school readers. It is salient to obtain the cooperation of parents and build feelings of involved trust between teacher and parent. Thus, teachers may well be involved in working with the parental community of learners. What might become relevant problem areas for this community of learners to engage in?

1. how to choose library books for student home reading.
2. how to read aloud to young children at home so that they become enthused readers.
3. how to help students at home in recognizing unknown words.
4. how to guide students understanding of what is being read.
5. how to encourage student reading endeavors at home.
6. how to assist students in the home setting to reflect upon content read.
7. how to motivate students in desiring to do more reading.
8. how to provide a learning environment in the home to facilitate student reading.
9. how to involve older siblings in helping young learners in reading achievement.
10. how to assist students in test taking when state mandated tests are forthcoming. Tests cause much anxiety on the part of students and parents, especially when high stakes are involved (Ediger, 1998, 149-154).

Problem areas become important to identify and achieve closure for students to benefit from the community of learners involving parents. Parents as partners is a major goal to attain in working toward better student reading achievement. Committees may be arranged in which parents in small groups study and deliberate relevant solutions to those problem areas being pursued. Consultant help may be provided as needed. The community of learners should try out new ideas in the home setting and report back to the entire group the obtained results.

Demonstration teaching may be used to indicate how a library book might be read aloud to children in the home setting. The demonstrated procedure may become a model to use in parents reading library books to their offspring. After using the model, feedback may be presented to the parental community in terms of how well the read aloud to children in the home setting influenced their love for reading. A video-tape can also be shown to participants on oral reading to young children. The contents therein must be evaluated in terms of answering the following questions:

1. did it capture student interest in the library book read?
2. did young children listen carefully to the ideas presented?
3. did the child participate in fully discussing the contents?
4. did the child voluntarily bring additional library books to the parent to read aloud at home?
5. did the young learner feel enthused about children's literature? (See Ediger, 1998, 4-8).

Parents may change off bringing refreshments to the community so that the sessions become increasingly enjoyable, worthwhile, and productive. It is up to the participants to make the learning community a successful endeavor. There can be much purpose involved in the community whereby the overall goal is to assist students to become better readers now and for future challenges in life.

## School Administrators in a Community of Learners

A vital asset in improving the reading curriculum is the involved school administrator. These leaders need to take a guiding role in the teaching of reading. School administrators, particularly the principal of the school, can have considerable influence in teaching and learning situations. The direction of school leadership needs to be based on knowledge, research, and recommended methods of instruction. Quality teaching methodology needs to be used in the classroom so that each learner may achieve as optimally as possible (See Ediger,1978, p. 37). Which might well become areas of study for school principals to improve the teaching of reading?

1. how should technology be used to improve reading instruction (See Ediger, 1996, 145-161)?
2. how may reading problems be diagnosed nd remedied? (Ediger, 1998, 161-165).

3. how might learning styles theory help students to achieve more optimally in reading? (See Searson and Dunn, 2001, 22-26).

3. how can multiple intelligences theory be brought into the assessment process of students in reading? (See Gardner, 1993).

4. how can school principals truly assist teachers to improve in the teaching of reading? Higher test scores are continually demanded from teachers in teaching reading, even unprecedented demands are made (Frank, p. 47.).

5. how can caring students be developed in the midst of the clamor for high stakes testing? (Ediger, 1994, 31- 43).

6. how might teachers assist students to think critically and creatively, as well as to solve relevant problems? (Ediger, 1998, 74-77).

7. how may teachers and school principals form a community of learners?

8. how should a community of learners operate to implement those ideas deemed vital for school success?

9. how could decision making prowess be extended to involve teachers in the school setting? (Ediger, 1998, 551 557).

10. how might teachers be encouraged to implement principles of learning from educational psychology in teaching reading? (Emery, 1992, 2-9).

In closing, students need to feel challenge to do the best possible to achieve optimally in reading. Communities of learners are there to assist in guiding students to do well in reading. They need to examine the quality of stated reading objectives and make suggestions for revision. The learning opportunities in reading need to provide for individual differences so that students individually may do as well as possible in learning to read well. Evaluation procedures must provide data on how well students are achieving in reading as well as ways to remediate that which guides more optimal progress for students in teaching and learning situations.

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